

Clarifications for SB 132 executive action

The Montana Board of Hearing Aid Dispensers unanimously agreed to send a letter opposing SB 132. The chairman of the Montana Board of Hearing Aid Dispensers is an audiologist, along with another audiologist who serves on the Board. The unanimous vote indicates that audiologists with proven experience in the dispensing field believe that dual licensure is necessary. Two hearing aid dispensers and the public member also voted to oppose SB 132.

24.222. 503 (3) (a) Administrative Rules of Montana regarding qualifications of audiologists requires a PhD degree after 2007. Audiologists licensed prior to 2007 do not require a PhD as long as they keep their licenses current.

Under SB 132 there is nothing to prevent an audiologist, licensed prior to 2007, to begin to dispense hearing aids.

Of the two audiologist members of the Speech Pathologist and Audiologist Board, only ONE is licensed to dispense hearing aids. The other's dispenser's license terminated 3/30/1989. One member out of five voting members has any type of current experience in dispensing hearing aids. Her term expires December 31, 2011.

The information disseminated by the audiologists at the March 16th hearing was incomplete. Comparing the 3 complaints to the Board of Speech Pathologists and Audiologists to the 211 to the Board of Hearing Aid Dispensers was misleading. Since the Board of Speech Pathologists and Audiologists do not currently regulate dispensing of hearing aids NONE of those 3 complaints dealt with hearing aids.

Complaints regarding problems with hearing aids would have been handled by the Board of Hearing Aid Dispensers. Accurate comparison provided by the Compliance Officer of the Department of Labor reflects 114 total complaints involving hearing aids, but does not break down the number of complaints by occupation, dispenser or audiologist. They are mixed.

Of the total 114 complaints, 83 were dismissed, and 8 remain open. Since 2003, 22 licensees were disciplined by the Board of Hearing Aid Dispensers; roughly 3 a year. Even though the specific occupation is not disclosed in the Department of Labor's report, at least one of the disciplinary actions was taken on an audiologist's license since that person had been convicted of a felony involving her practice and was widely publicized at the time.

The current law governing speech pathologists and audiologists (37-15-103 (5)) is seriously flawed and needs to be fixed before any hearing aid dispensing is contemplated.

Susan Good Geise for Montana Hearing Society

The two audiologists who serve on the Board of Hearing Aid Dispensers oppose SB 132.

PhD audiologists may be experienced in hearing aid dispensing, but audiologists licensed prior to 2007 would be able dispense under SB 132 without the experience of the PhD.

Of the 5 members of the Speech Pathologist and Audiologist Board only 1 audiologist is licensed to dispense hearing aids. The other audiologist has not been licensed as a dispenser since 1989. Other board members have any experience at all and aren't qualified to regulate hearing aid dispensing.

While many complaints are filed with the Board of Hearing Aid Dispensers, roughly 3 a year are disciplined. No current break down which are audiologists and which are dispensers. (Department of Labor compliance specialist, March 18, 2011)

Many hearing aids are dispensed through the Veterans Administration. Dissatisfied patients have no recourse through the Montana complaint process. Only audiologists may dispense through the VA, but none of their complaints will be reflected at the state level.

Compare HAD and AU complaints from FY 2002 to now.

[illegible]

The audiologist board does not deal with hearing complaints.

Hearing Dispenser Board report does not identify causes by audiologist or hearing aid dispenser

Of 114 complaints, 22 have resulted in disciplinary Action